

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Congressman Jeff Fortenberry's Help Haitian Adoptees Immediately to Integrate Act of 2010 (H.R. 5283), also known as the Help HAITI Act, passed the House of Representatives this evening. This legislation would provide legal certainty to the more than 1,000 Haitian orphans who were evacuated to the United States after the earthquake. It would enable adoptive American families to obtain permanent residency for these children more quickly and efficiently. This legislation is the product of dialogue and outreach to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

"I am pleased that Congress has today acted to give much-needed security to more than 1,000 Haitian orphans who were in the process of being adopted by American families before the tragic earthquake," said Fortenberry. "These vulnerable children have endured heartbreaking tragedy to come to this country, and are now united with their adopted families in Nebraska and throughout the United States. The best thing we could do is give these children and their adoptive families the comfort of knowing they are here to stay."

Following the January earthquake, these orphans were evacuated to American soil by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security with the Haitian Government's permission, before their adoptions could be finalized in Haitian courts. Due to a technicality in the law, however, these Haitian children, upon establishing a legal relationship with their adoptive U.S. parents, would have had to wait two years before they may become legal permanent residents. As long as their status in the United States remained temporary, they would have had fewer legal protections, might not have been eligible for critical resources, and faced the risk of being forced to repatriate to Haiti if something were to happen to their adoptive families.

The House-passed Fortenberry Help HAITI Act of 2010 would help to normalize the immigration procedures involving Haitian orphans by allowing adoptive American families to apply immediately to obtain legal permanent residency for their children and enable them to eventually qualify for U.S. citizenship. This legislation would also help reduce the staff, monetary and other resource demands on the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service.

Fortenberry is a member of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee.

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